WHIRRAKEE

September 2005 Vol. 26 No. 8

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Rob Moors, Maurie Lewis, Glenise Moors, Rod Orr, Bob Ruddick, and there are 3 vacancies.

Excursions are conducted irregularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active group that meets regularly (the Fauna Study Group) and other groups that meet at irregular intervals.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: This group has field excursions and the occasional lecture evening. Please consult the *Whirrakee* for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.
To propose meetings or excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see bottom of page 2.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 26, No.8, September 2005
Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

CONTENT

Item	Contributor	Page
Short notices		3
All in a day's work for a WRIN shelter operator	Brenda Cheers	4
August General Meeting – Speaker: Peter Robertson		
The pink-tailed worm lizard	Sabine Wilkens	5
Destructive galahs – why?	Gregg Muller	7
A very interesting psyllid	Rod Orr	8
More short notices and an apology		9
Speaker Syllabus for the remainder of 2005	Rod Orr	10

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's note: This was going to be our big bird issue and it has a rare bird indeed on the front cover and a lot of other interesting articles in it. A real spring edition! Please note that we have had a change or speaker for the AGM. What all the good weather for gardening we have had, Marylin's talk comes at a perfect time. There is also an environmental report available on Jackass Flat. This is not for comment, just for information. Bill Holsworth has a copy if anybody wants to have a look at this.
As I write this, I am looking forward to the 60th Anniversary dinner, it should be a great night out! Please look at the nice letter from Chris Bunn on page 9.

Front Cover Photograph – Photographer and Author: Rod Orr

What a sight – ten Freckled Ducks all lined up along a log at Kennington Reservoir. Almost sounds like one of those mind-bogglingly banal examples of business jargon, doesn't it? They, who are steeped in this way of thinking and speaking, seem to like the idea of 'lining up all of the ducks', and pretend to see some depth of meaning in this concept. What we observed this morning, however, was a real case of all of the ducks lining themselves up and not someone's fantasy. After we had seen them early this morning, we were told that another couple were seen moving ever closer to them - even worse, one from each side - simply trying to get a much closer look at these rare birds. The Freckled Ducks were disturbed eventually and retreated into the water. It makes you wonder about how much people generally understand the needs of wild creatures, doesn't it? (Talk about 'begging the question'!)

Short Notices

A New Book for Bendigo....
Wildlife of the Box-Ironbark Country
By Chris Tzaros
Published by CSIRO Publishing at an advertised cost of $39.95 plus $9.00 for postage and handling.
Additional orders for this book are now available for $30.00 at the September general meeting. If you would like to buy this book through the Club, and missed placing an order, we could make an additional order if there is sufficient demand. Please send a message Bill Holsworth (5443 4063). The books will NOT be re-ordered if only a very few members want it.

Editor's Note: Quite a few members have already purchased this book. Would anyone volunteer to do a book review for the Whirrakee?
Personally, I think the bush noises on the accompanying CD are so beautiful, they are worth the purchase alone.

Challenges for Bird Conservation in the 21st Century:
Birds in a Changing Environment
BIRDS AUSTRALIA SCIENTIFIC CONGRESS AND CAMPOUT
Bendigo, Victoria, October 2005

Further information:
More information about the Congress, including location, accommodation and activities is available on the Congress website
http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/congress/index.html

Whipstick Westringia project
Ben Thomas will lead a *Westringia* spotting excursion on Monday 10th October. Anyone can come along, starting time 9am, place to meet yet to be determined.
Amongst the participants will be TAFE and uni students. Please contact Ben at DSE for further information (5430 4444).

Bendigo Field Naturalists' Club Name Badges
The ad for name badges has been in a couple of months now. If you want a badge, please act now, by leaving a phone message on 5443 5668, if you want your name to be added to the list for Name Badges. We intend to order them as soon as possible after the first 20 names have been received. If we cannot achieve this threshold number we will still try to negotiate the best price and let you know what this is before we have them made.

Don't forget to look for Glenise's and Jan's banded Flame Robins...
(see article in the July Whirrakee)

Please help us find our birds and collect more information. Jan's contact details are Phone (03) 54435668 and mine are Phone (03) 54396254 and e-mail: glenise@netcon.net.au

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BFNC Garden Working Bee

The next working bee will be on **Saturday, 10th of September, 9am.**

All welcome

Camp Outs
Australian Naturalists Network (ANN) Get-together
The Australian Naturalists Network (ANN) has sent a reminder that all Naturalists in Australia are invited to the Get-together in the High Country of Victoria from 16 Jan. to 2 Feb.2006. See page 9 of this edition for details.

SEANA Spring Camp
The South East Australian Naturalists Association (SEANA) will hold its spring camp at Mallacoota 14-18 October. This year's camp is hosted by the Sale and District Field Naturalists' Club. Registration is $40.00 plus extra for meals if required, plus extra for some excursions. Forms will be available at the next meeting or from Bill Holsworth at home. They should be sent to the organiser asap.

All in a day's work for a WRIN shelter operator

By Brenda Cheers

Towards the end of 2004, holiday makers saw the body of a red kangaroo on the road somewhere in the Mildura region. They stopped to check and found a joey in the pouch. Collecting the joey and carefully wrapping her, they headed home to Ballarat before attempting to find help. A shelter was located and Lucy was handed over. A few weeks later, I was contacted, as the shelter could no longer keep the now 4kg Lucy. Lucy came to Maryborough where arrangements had already been made for her eventual transfer back to her own location. Lucy was called Red from day one at home, somehow it suited her better. Red was with Garry and I for four months and on transfer weighed a healthy 12.5kg.

As Garry and I are unable to take trips together because of the wildlife in care, Helan, a lovely friend, offered to drive me to Red's new home. Red had joined up with a western grey joey we also had in care, so it was decide the most stress free outcome for both animals was for Mytch [aboriginal word for west] to join Red at her new home.

Transferring large animals required plenty of planning, this began one month before the transfer date when their daily routine began to slowly change to accommodate the planned events of the transfer morning. A long acting medication was given to each animal three days before the trip. Helan arrived the day before, so there would be no hiccups in that area. Early on the transfer morning the two were given another sedative, then their normal morning bottle, about 15 minutes later, yet another sedative was offered, this ensured the two were calm and sleepy. Each was placed into a specially made travel bag that would enable me to monitor each without having to delve into bags. I could also cool them off with damp towels without having to move them, and, just in case extra sedatives were needed, these could be administered without the need for struggling to get at them through cloth bags.

After an 8hr trip, we arrived at Red and Mytch's new home, Ulmurra Station. Nampoo, the adjoining station, is also owned by Red and Mytch's new carers. Where Ulmurra bounds the Murray river bank, Nampoo sits high atop cliffs overlooking the Murray and to try and describe its beauty is impossible. How I wished we had had more time. We saw the longest river in Australia, as well as the shortest, not forgetting the most famous. The most famous and the shortest both act as boundaries for two of Leanne and Paul's properties. Can anyone name the three?

Despite my promise five minutes into the trip to never take on another animal that needs to be returned to outback areas, I've weakened already; our host showed us some incredible sights during our short stay. I suspect it is highly likely we'll take them up on their offer of going back. Of special interest was seeing and 'touching' some of the places a gentleman christened 'old possum' lived in for over 50 years. This incredible New Zealander arrived in Australia in the late 1920's and lived his life as a hermit along the Murray River around the borders of NSW, SA and VIC where we were. I had read the book 'A Man Called Possum' many years ago and when Helan and I arrived home, got out my copy and browsed through the pictures, somehow feeling very close to Old Possum as we looked at places we had just been and read the names of people we had spoken to, not to mention Kulcurna Station, one of the places Old Possum had visited, where Helan and I had been invited to join an outback birthday party.

We also visited another shelter in Mildura, a not to be missed visit for me, as it is more than two years since I last visited, that also was to transfer a Red Kangaroo, and a chance for Helan to meet yet another one of 'us'. How ironic was it that I was asked to take on an Eastern Grey Kangaroo that had been picked up by holiday makers in Ararat and taken home to Mildura before attempting to find help.

Editor's comment

...and here is another snippet from the lives of Brenda and Garry. I think it is so amazing what they do, perhaps you might find this interesting as well...

...another couple of days worth of work in the lives of a shelter operator...

At the last WRIN meeting (August), Garry and Brenda were really pushed for time. They had had a rough couple of days with the animals. Brenda had to slowly reorganise all the feeds, simply so she could attend the meeting and this meant getting up twice each night to do feeds. Then they received a phone call from the police just on bedtime on Friday night – a possum had been hit and killed, and it had a joey, would we take it? This meant that Brenda had to stay up until after midnight, monitoring the heat control, then up twice for feeds, then be ready to leave for the meeting earlier than planned to leave the young possum with a babysitter in Bendigo. During the meeting, Brenda got a call for an echidna down a concrete pit. Picking up the possum and then getting home to organise help for the echidna and feed the animals in care...*unbelievable.*

August General meeting – Speaker: Peter Robertson "The *Aprasia* Tale – studies of the Pink-tailed Worm Lizard in the Bendigo region"

by Sabine Wilkens

Peter Robertson has, in previous years, worked for DSE in various surveys but left the department in 1996 and has done consulting work since.

The Pink-tailed Worm Lizard, *Aprasia parapulchella* belongs to the family Pygopodidae. It is not closely related to lizards but more to the gecko subfamily Diplodactylinae. The bearded gecko from the mallee is probably its closest relative and like this animal, Pink-tailed Worm Lizards do not have moveable eyelids.

There are ten species of *Aprasia* in total and they are distributed over southern Australia. In Victoria there are four species. The pink-tailed worm lizard, the pink-nosed worm lizard, the mallee worm lizard and the striped worm lizard. Some Pink-tailed worm lizards do not actually have a very pink tail to add to the confusion.

However, all four members of the genus are small legless lizards, they are all fossorial, generally less than 20cm long, they all eat ants, ant eggs and pupae and they all live and move around underground ant galleries.

They are thigmothermic which means they are attracted to surfaces with a temperature suitable for them, around about 28-29°C (they thus maintain their temperature in a suitable range by behavioural adaptations).

The females lay two eggs a year in a single clutch

This lizard has a short but amazing history:

Pre 1920. a single individual was collected during a geological survey and lodged with the Museum of Victoria.

1975. a further individual was found during a joint expedition of the Bendigo and Geelong Field Naturalists clubs to the Whipstick forest. A Geelong FNC member David King located and photographed the animal.

1976. Dave King published his findings, including some illustrations in the 'Geelong Naturalist'. He had thought the animal was a blind snake and had identified it as *Ramphotyphlops wiedii*..

Some time after this, Peter Robertson got to review a paper about this species of blind snake and tracked back to the article published in the 'Geelong Naturalist'. Peter saw the illustrations accompanying the article and concluded that the animal's eyes were too large for a blind snake. He subsequently wrote to Dave King and was shown a rather good photograph. There was no record of any *Aprasia* in central Victoria at that time but a similar species was known in the ACT, *Aprasia parapulchella*, and another in the Mt Lofty Ranges of South Australia, *Aprasia pseudopulchella*. Finding this animal in the middle (geographically) represented a very strange and disjunct distribution indeed.

1986. Peter Robertson went with Dave King on an expedition to the Whipstick in the hope of turning up more of the animals, however, this was unsuccessful.
Shortly afterwards, Dale Gibbons reported a finding from Mandurang underneath a house.

1987. During a pitfall trapping expedition to the Whipstick forest, several more individuals were found..

It was still not clear what name should be given to this species, either one of the two existing species or something new and different altogether? Genetic analysis showed the two species from ACT and Mt Lofty Ranges to be very similar, and the type from Central Victoria to be intermediate between the two (not very surprising). It was, however, decided to call it the same name as the ACT species as it was a 'bit more similar' to that one, thus its name became *Aprasia parapulchella*.

1990. Further sightings were made south of Bendigo.
1994. A daft recovery plan was proposed for the species.
1995. *A parapulchella* was formally recognised as being endangered in Victoria.
1997. Listed as threatened species under the FFG Act.

2000 – 2003. More surveys were conducted within the One Tree hill region and other potential habitat south of Bendigo.

After 2000, the potential ecological requirements of *Aprasia* were incorporated into management plans. However, very little is actually known about the real requirements of this species. How does it react to fire, for example? As this is not known, potential Pink-tailed Worm Lizard country is generally exempted form burning at this stage. This is, however, not based on any knowledge that this species cannot cope with fire, perhaps more of a precautionary principle. During question time after the talk, Peter was informed of a large fire a couple of years ago in the Whipstick, of which he had not been aware. Whether the possible existence of the species was considered in that case is unlikely.

Pink-tailed Worm Lizards are associated with Ironbark country and rocky terrain. However, pitfall trapping has confirmed that they are not confined to this type of country, they are probably just easier to locate by turning over rocks. Nevertheless 2000 to 3000 rocks have to be moved, on average, to locate a single specimen of Pink-tail worm Lizard. The present map of distribution has the original Whipstick findings, quite a few sightings from One Tree Hill and a couple of outlying observations, one at Mt Sugarloaf and one at Maiden Gully. The aspect and slope of the terrain seems to be common factors and modelling is currently underway to identify more potential habitat from what little we know so far.

Threatening processes are usually identified as part of recovery plan. For the pink-tailed Worm Lizard these seem to be mainly clearing and degradation of its habitat by weed invasion, introduction of predators, rock disturbance, fragmentation of remaining habitat and inappropriate fire (whatever that might be). The National Recovery Plan is currently being reviewed and input is sought.

A lot more needs to be learned about this species before effective action can be taken to conserve it. Here is an animal at risk of extinction before it becomes really known to us. Its conservation seems a great responsibility for us who live close to this very interesting animal.

Darren Green thanked Peter Robertson. It was nice to see him back in the country and as it turned out, Darren was actually responsible for one of the outlying observations - at Maiden Gully.
The hall was packed for this meeting. The atmosphere was fantastic, and Peter Robertson made everybody feel that the excursion into the bitter cold night was worth it.

Another new book....

Snakes,Lizards and Frogs of the Victorian Mallee

by Michael Swan and Simon Watharow

PB, 111pages CSIRO PUBLISHING
RRP (AU) $ 29.95 P.& H $ 8.00 (within Australia) Can be purchased directly from website as well
<http://www.mikeswanherpbooks.com.au>
see 'Newly added titles'.

The Victorian Mallee region encompasses the Little Desert, the Big Desert, the Sunset Country and the Hattah-Kulkyne. Each area is unique and with different topography, vegetation and fauna.

Continued on page 10...

Destructive Galahs – Why?

By Gregg Muller

Earlier this year, a pair of Galahs were noted in a grey box outside the Ironbark Centre, on the La Trobe university campus in Bendigo, systematically stripping the bark from the trunk and branches in a fashion that would have eventually encircled the trunk of the tree and the branches. (A nest box had been placed in the tree several years earlier, and a pair of galahs had successfully raised a pair of chicks in it in 2004.) I stopped and observed the birds for several minutes on a number of occasions, and they did not appear to be feeding on the bark or insects under the bark. Concerned that the tree might die, we protected the area with chicken wire, saving it from further decortication. I had never heard of this behaviour in birds before.

Last week, on an excursion with my second year Nature Tourism students at Terrick Terrick National Park, we came across the grey box illustrated in the picture on the right. It appears to have suffered a similar fate. The nature of the spoil below the tree indicated that the bark has been chipped off, rather than consumed. The changes in colouration of the exposed timber indicated several episodes of bark removal, over perhaps several years. Fresh resin exuding from the edge of the bark, and the change in colouration of the exposed wood indicated that bark had recently been removed.

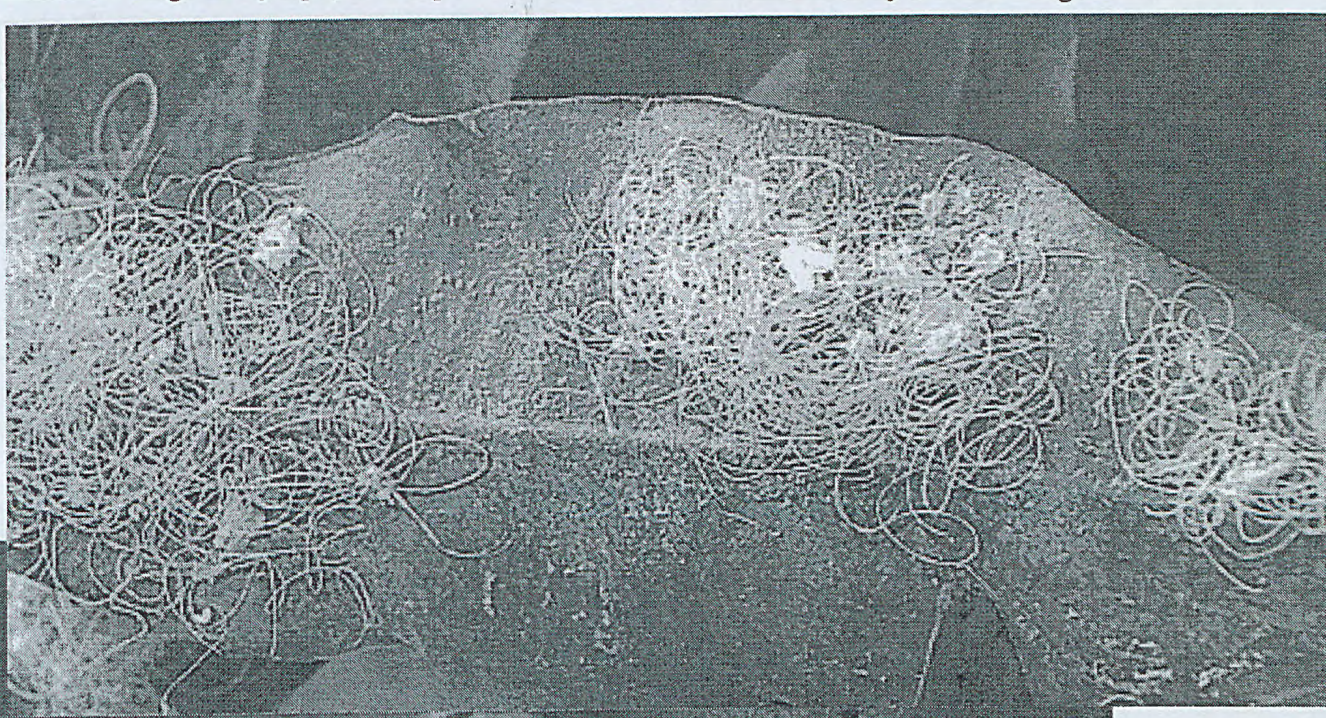
Is this behaviour on the part of the galahs forest engineering to kill trees and provide tree hollows for nesting? Given the long time periods required for hollow formation in large trees, it seems unlikely that the birds responsible for the ringbarking would ever get to nest in hollows so formed. The behaviour is also interesting given that it took place immediately adjacent to the nestbox mounted in the tree at La Trobe, where birds had successfully raised young - seemingly obviating the need for hollows in that immediate locality.

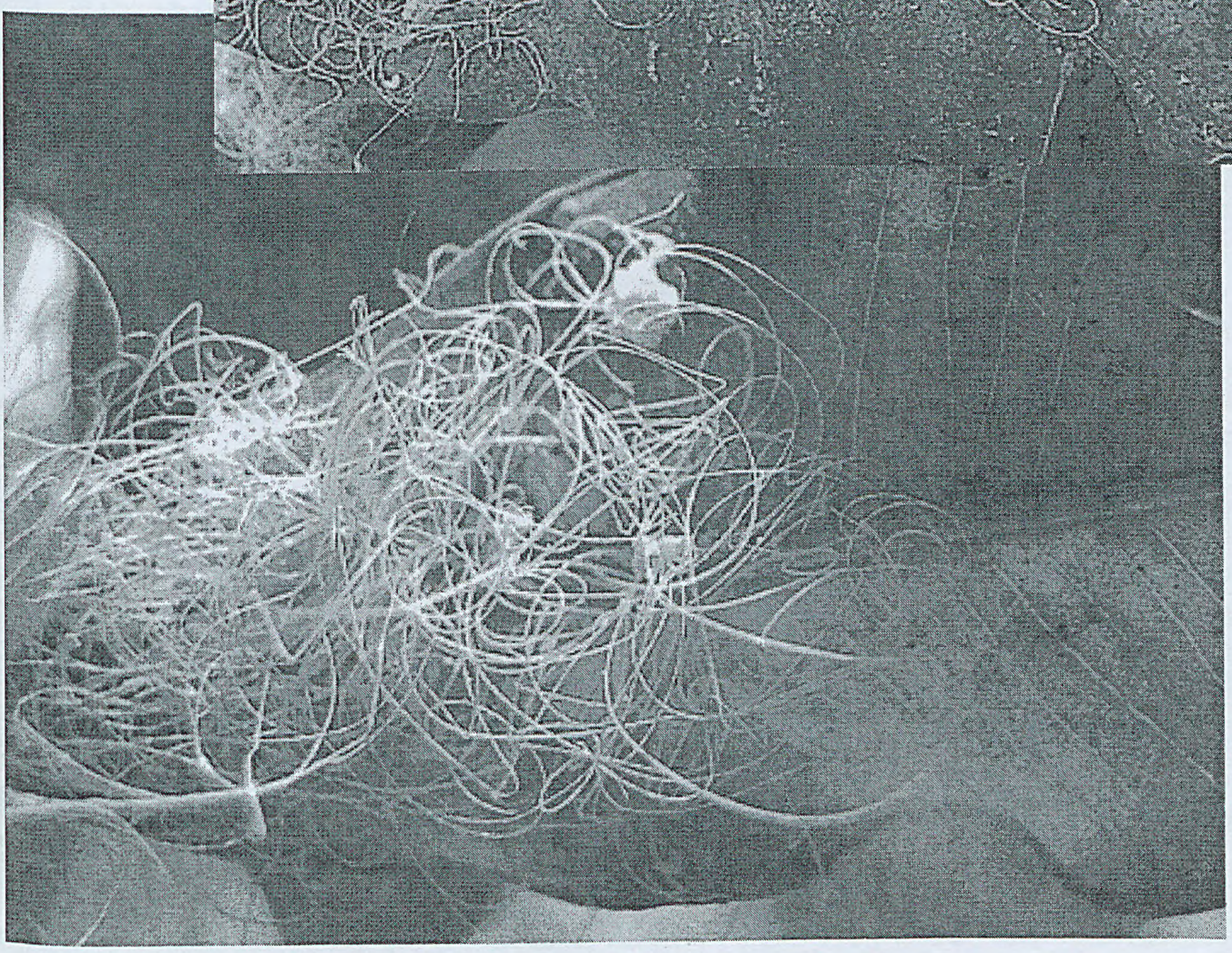
Any comments?

A very interesting psyllid

Photographer: Rod Orr

This fantastic construction on a lilypily tree was made by the psyllid, *Aleurodicus* sp. from the family of White Flies (Order Hemiptera). Rod did not know the species of lilypily (it did not have fruit or flowers), but it is a native and he presumes so is the animal. Rod noted that the leaves below these 'decorated' ones were infested with sooty mould. The 'crawler' psyllid (the immature stage or nymph) is a sap-sucker. A lot of sap goes through their bodies. This may be partly because this sap is under pressure and they virtually get force-fed, and partly because the amount of essential amino acids and minerals in this sap is so low and they need a lot to fulfil their nutritional requirements. The excess sap comes out the other end and is used to build this protective construction. There is usually still some sap left over that drips on the branches and leaves below. Those sticky leaves are then colonised by a black fungus.





More short notices

Letter from Chris and Sandra Bunn

Sabine,
Would you pass on my apologies, I would have loved to have made it to the 60th celebrations, having been a member for 30 of those years but being held on a Wednesday made it just a little too difficult.

If in the new year the club wants a speaker about wildlife diseases and can give me enough warning I would love to come back to Bendigo. I am currently workwise involved with avian influenza and the running of the Australian wildlife Health network.

This sounds interesting. Chris also included two articles which I will publish in the next edition.

Spring in the Bendigo Bush

BFNC will have a small part in this yearly event. If anybody wants to get involved please contact Bill Holsworth or Sally Buttle at the Discovery Centre. Sally is again the chief administrator of the program.

Australian Naturalists Network (ANN) Get-together

The Australian Naturalists Network (ANN) has sent a reminder that all Naturalists in Australia are invited to the Get-together in the High Country of Victoria from 16 Jan. to 2 Feb.2006. The initial base for activities will be Feathertop Chalet, Harrietville. Excursions to Mt. Buffalo National Park, Mt. Hotham, and Mt. Bogong areas will be organised. The evening programs will include speakers on flora, fauna, fires and geology. From Thurs. 26 Jan to 2 Feb. the group will be based at the Jindabyne Sport and recreation Centre and visit areas within Kosciuszko National Park. All travel, accommodation and meals are included and "tagalong participation is not an option". The cost will be about $1,600 all inclusive, and a deposit of $500 will be due 1 August (possibly later if space is still available). Contact Bill Holsworth at home for further details.

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Guest Speaker Syllabus for General Meetings 2005

Second Wednesday of the month, 8:00 pm

Please check each *WHIRRAKEE* for additional events or changes.
The general meeting will start at 7:30pm, with the speaker being introduced at 8:00pm.

Date - 2005	Topic	Speaker
September 14 AGM	'Growing indigenous plants in home gardens'	Marilyn Sprague (Goldfields Nursery),
October 12	'Xanthorrhoea - ecology and flowering'	Mark Bellette (University of Melbourne)
November 9	'Owls of the World'	David Hollands (Wildlife Photographer)
December 14	Christmas Diner. 'The Giant Gippsland Earthworm - conservation issues'	Neville Rosengren (La Trobe University)

Snakes, Lizards and frogs of the Victorian Mallee...continued from page 6

...The region experiences consistently higher temperatures, lower rainfall and contains a greater diversity of reptiles than any other part of the state.
Snakes, Lizards and Frogs of the Victorian Mallee represents the first comprehensive publication on the herpetofauna of the region. It covers 56 species that inhabit the area as well as a further 24 species occurring in fringe riverine and woodland systems. The reader is able to identify species by means of a photograph supported by a distribution map, a diagnostic features key and descriptive species accounts.

Contents:
Introduction to the Victorian Mallee, Species accounts, Southern Frogs, Geckos, Flap-footed Lizards, Skinks, Dragons, Monitor Lizards, Blind Snakes, Venomous Land Snakes, Victorian Mallee fringe-dwellers, Checklist of species, Victorian flora and fauna and conservation categories, Surveying Mallee frogs and reptiles, Glossary, References and further information Snakebite, Snake prevention around the house, Index

Readership:
Natural history enthusiasts, bushwalkers, environmentalists, State & local government environmental officers, Wildlife shelter staff, Land for Wildlife, property owners Environmental science and biology students

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings

Wednesday, September 14 7.30pm

Annual General Meeting. The speaker is Marylin Sprague 'Landscaping with native plants'.. This talk will include something about soil preparation, mulches, plant selection and other topics.

Wednesday, October 12 7.30pm
Mark Bellette (University of Melbourne) will talk about 'Xanthorrhoea - ecology and flowering.

Fauna Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.

Excursions

Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30, the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179 or 5442 1813. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone but go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30 then the excursion is not on.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals.
It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Natural Resources and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.
Next WRIN Meeting – 1st October, 1pm (The speaker will probably start around 2pm).
$2.00 to cover costs.
Topic: Powerful Owls.
Speaker: Dale Gibbons

N.B. Garry and Brenda Cheers have, on numerous occasions, expressed their thanks to BFNC for having a permanent place in the Whirrakee. However, this appreciation goes both ways, as our readership will always appreciate news and upcoming events as well as having a place where they can always find the telephone number quickly should the need arise.

BFNC Garden Working Bee

Regular garden working bees are held on the Saturday before each general meeting.

The next working bee will be on
Saturday, 10th of September, 9am.

All welcome

ANGAIR Inc 2005 Wildflower Show & Art Show

Anglesea Memorial Hall, McMillan Street
September 17th & 18th, 10am to 5pm.

Local wildflowers, terrestrial orchids, Australian native garden flowers, environmental weed displays, wildflower walks and bus trips (optional) are included in the admission price.
Adults $ 4.00
Pensioners and Students $ 2.00
Children under 12 free
Proceeds from the Annual Wildflower Show are used for land conservation purposes in the local area.
For further information contact
ANGAIR Inc, PO Box 12, Anglesea, Vic 3230.
Phone/Fax (03) 5263 1085 or phone (03) 5289 6562
e-mail: angair@pipeline.com.au